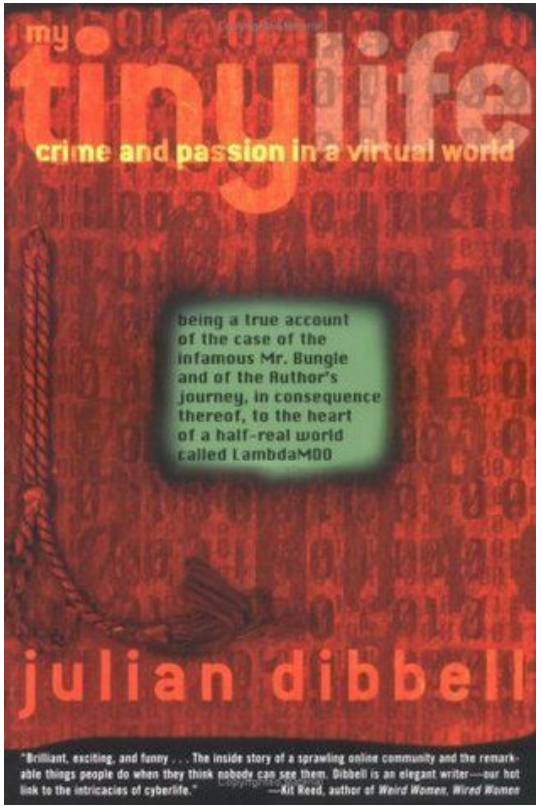
tilde town conference twenty twenty five keynote by vilmibm

A cyber-phenomenological inquiry into art, spirit, and community in text based virtual environments, or, Neuromanticism

introduction

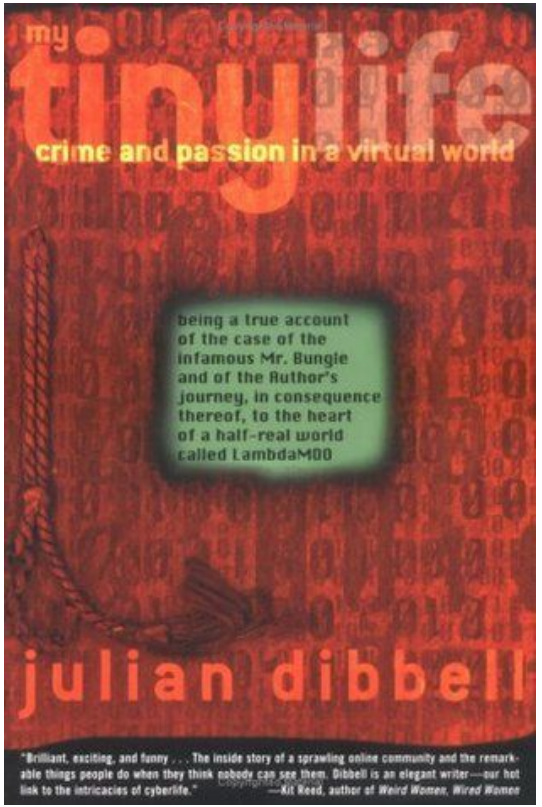
hi

From MUDs to here


my
tiny life
crime and passion in a virtual world
being a true account of the case of the infamous Mr. Bungle and of the Author's journey, in consequence thereof, to the heart of a half-real world called LambdaMOO
julian dibbell
"Brilliant, exciting, and funny . . . The inside story of a sprawling online community and the remarkable things people do when they think nobody can see them. Dibbell is an elegant writer—our hot link to the intricacies of cyberlife."
—Kit Reed, author of Weird Women, Wired Women

From MUDs to here

Do these people in fact not have lives? Can anybody possibly invest such time and energy in such a place and not be in the throes of a miserable, soul-wasting addiction? Ought there to be a law or something against this stuff, lest the best years of our nation's youths be lost to building castles in the digital air?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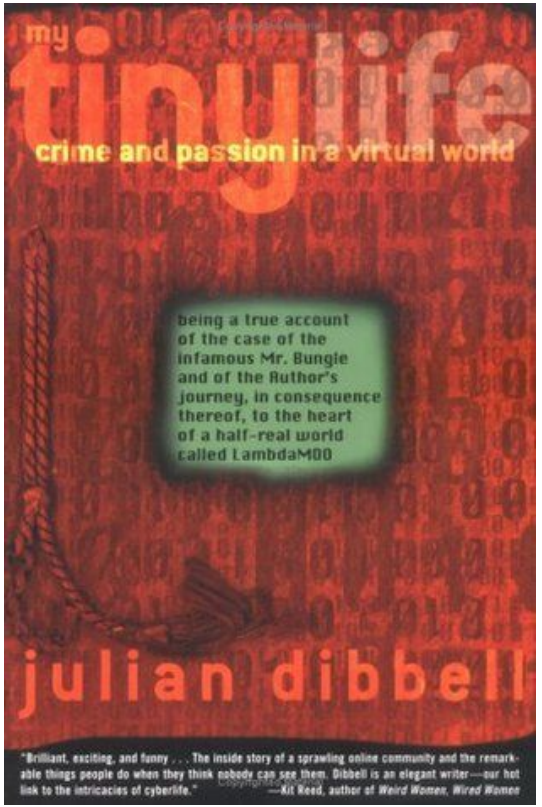
From MUDs to here

...in many cases [online text based virtual environments] serve players as a kind of therapeutic environment, allowing them to come to grips with issues of identity and desire that might otherwise go on to hobble them in real life.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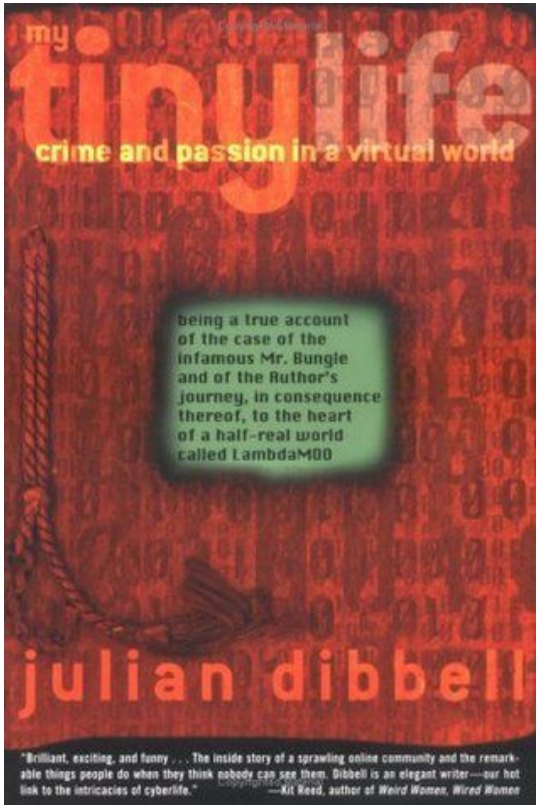
From MUDs to here

[intensive online periods] are often transient in nature coinciding with and easing periods of difficult adjustment in a [user's] life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CYBERPHENOMENOLOGY

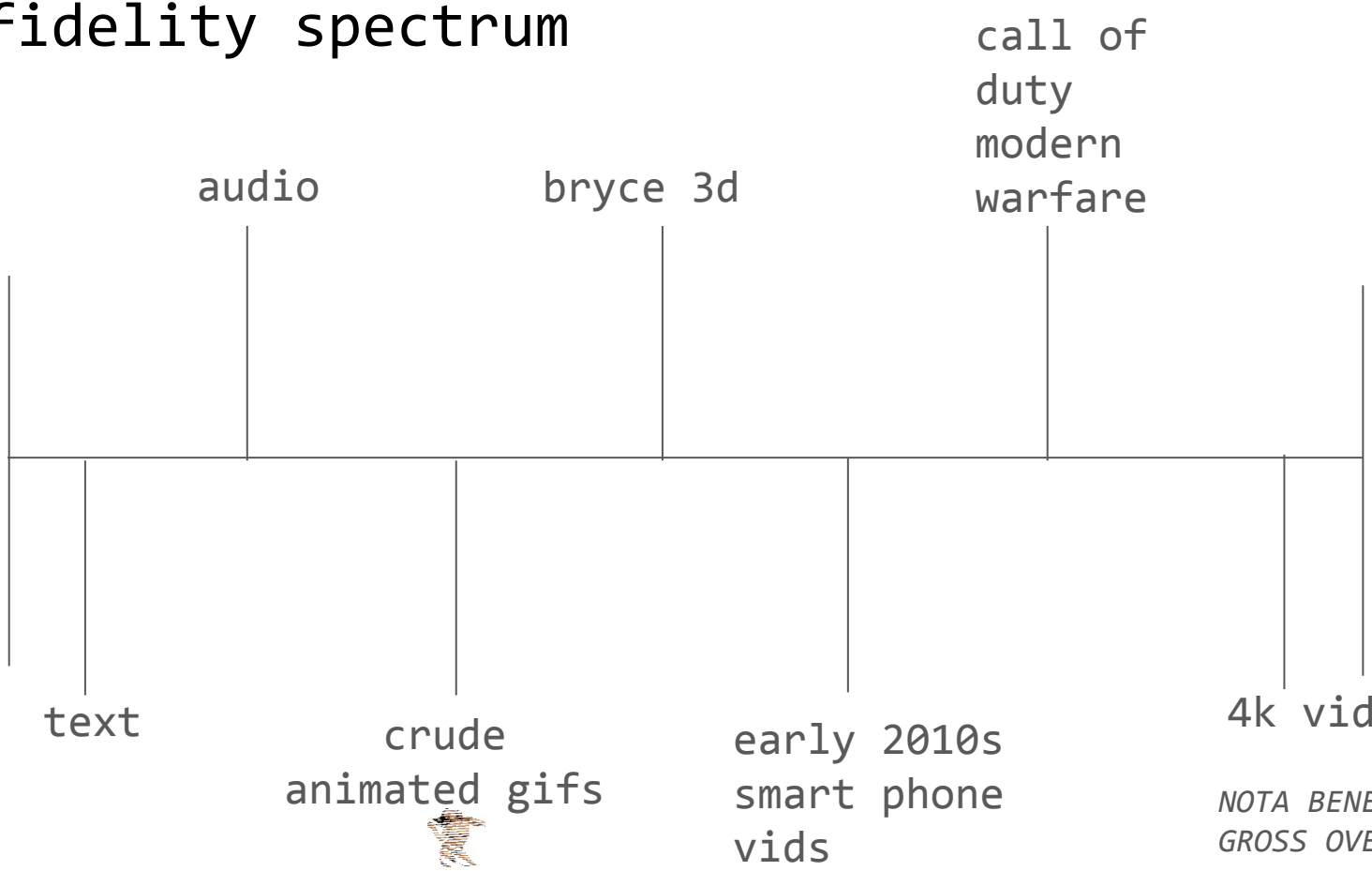
Cyberphenomenology

Phenomenology is the objective investigation of the subjective experience.

I don't use the word in a strict sense but to refer to the act of pondering what exactly it is that goes on inside my brain, my nervous system, my consciousness, and my imagination.

Thus, cyberphenomenology is my pondering of my nervous system, consciousness, and imagination when there is a computing device in the feedback loop of the self.

fidelity spectrum



NOTA BENE: THIS IS A HUGE, GROSS OVERSIMPLICATION

fidelity spectrum

audio

bryce 3d

call of duty modern warfare

imagination does more work

imagination does less work

text

crude animated gifs

early 2010s smart phone vids

4k video

NOTA BENE: THIS IS A HUGE, GROSS OVERSIMPLICATION

what even is art, anyway?

I have been afraid to apply because I don't make enough art

I want to do something creative but my ideas are bad

I did a thing but it’s insignificant

A Thing Defined By What It Isn’t And What It Doesn’t

let’s consult Theodor Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory (1970)*:

“(art) is defined by its relation to what it is not.”

“The basic levels of experience that motivate art are related to those of the objective world from which they recoil.”

"We don't understand music; it understands us"

A Thing Defined By What It Isn’t And What It Doesn’t

- **An object becomes an art object based on context**
  - human observation/reaction at a point in time that led to emotional impression

L'œil, comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers L'INFINI

** useless != purposeless*

A Thing Defined By What It Isn’t And What It Doesn’t

- An object becomes an art object based on context
  - human observation/reaction at a point in time that led to emotional impression
- **It is allowed to be fully useless*, unlike a tool or piece of equipment**
  - is a hammer that cannot pound nails still a hammer?

** useless != purposeless*

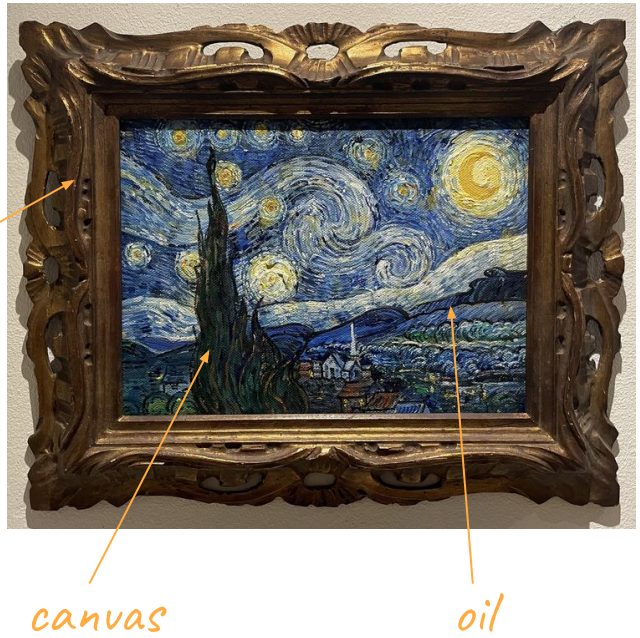
A Thing Defined By What It Isn’t And What It Doesn’t

- An object becomes an art object based on context
  - human observation/reaction at a point in time that led to emotional impression
- It is allowed to be fully useless*, unlike a tool or piece of equipment
  - is a hammer that cannot pound nails still a hammer?
- **It could be a tool, too, but would still have value to a human observer if it is never once used**

** useless != purposeless*

A Thing Defined By What It Isn’t And What It Doesn’t

- This is kindling



A Thing Defined By What It Isn’t And What It Doesn’t

- This is kindling
- But if we choose to leave it unburned, it may delight us

A Youthful Misconception

- I got to college in 2006 and decided to *Do Computers*

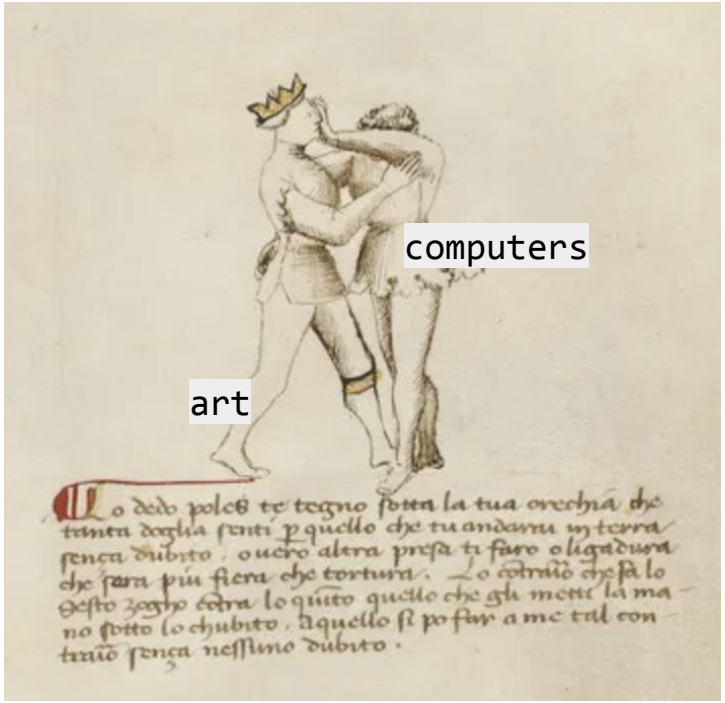
A Youthful Misconception

- I got to college in 2006 and decided to *Do Computers*
- but I was afraid of *Becoming IBM*

A Youthful Misconception

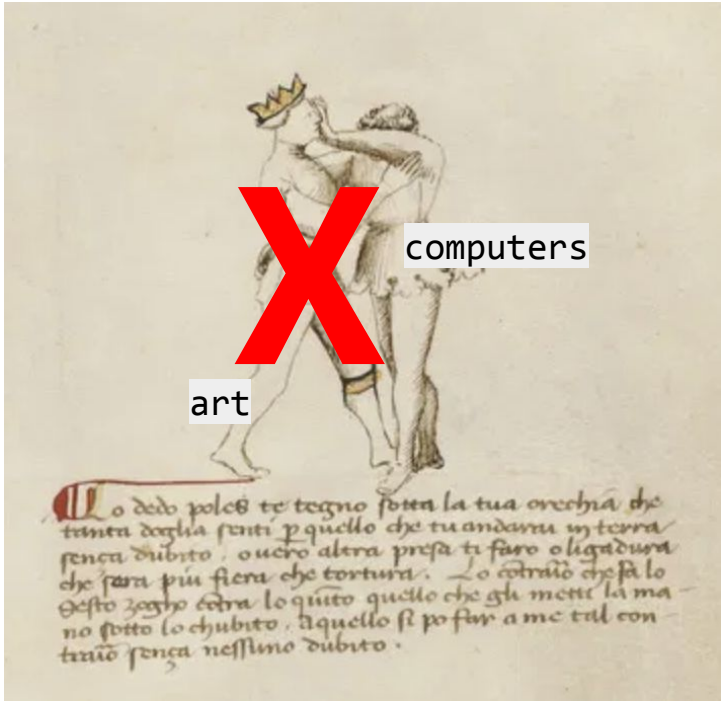
- I got to college in 2006 and decided to *Do Computers*
- but I was afraid of *Becoming IBM*
- so I resolved to *Do Art(?)*

A Youthful Misconception


computers
art
Lo dedo polce te tegno sotta la tua orechia che
tenta doglia senti p quello che tu andassi in terra
senca dubito, o altra presa ti faro o ligadura
che sara piu fiera che tortura. Lo contrario che fa lo
questo zogho contra lo quito quello che gli mette la ma
no sotto lo chubito, a quello si po far a me tal con
trario senca nessuno dubito.

Before 2006

A Youthful Misconception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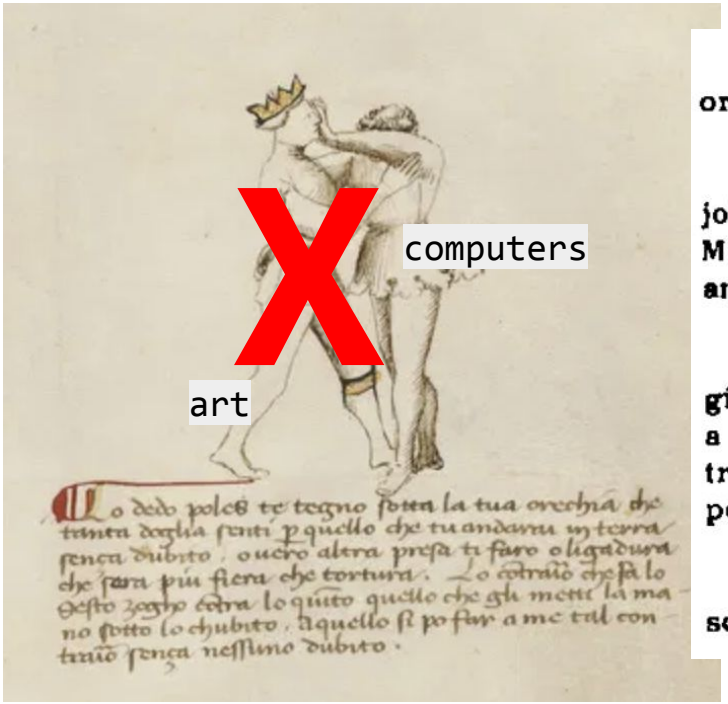
A Youthful Misconception



Man has created the myth of "the computer" in his own image, or one of them: cold, immaculate, sterile, "scientific," oppressive.

Some people flee this image. Others, drawn toward it, have joined the cold-sterile-oppressive cult, and propagate it like a faith. Many are still about this mischief, making people do things rigidly and saying it is the computer's fault.

Still others see computers for what they really are: versatile gizmos which may be turned to any purpose, in any style. And so a wealth of new styles and human purposes are being proposed and tried, each proponent propounding his own dream in his own very personal way.

This book presents a panoply of things and dreams. Perhaps some will appeal to the reader...

from "Computer Lib" by Ted Nelson, 1975

Code and Its Execution Can Be Art

- This is donut.c
- It’s C code in the shape of a donut

```
            k;double sin()
         ,cos();main(){float A=
       0,B=0,i,j,z[1760];char b[
     1760];printf("\x1b[2J");for(;;
   ){memset(b,32,1760);memset(z,0,7040)
   ;for(j=0;6.28>j;j+=0.07)for(i=0;6.28
  >i;i+=0.02){float c=sin(i),d=cos(j),e=
  sin(A),f=sin(j),g=cos(A),h=d+2,D=1/(c*
  h*e+f*g+5),l=cos      (i),m=cos(B),n=s\
in(B),t=c*h*g-f*        e;int x=40+30*D*
(l*h*m-t*n),y=            12+15*D*(l*h*n
+t*m),o=x+80*y,          N=8*((f*e-c*d*g
 )*m-c*d*e-f*g-l        *d*n);if(22>y&&
 y>0&&x>0&&80>x&&D>z[o]){z[o]=D;;;b[o]=
 ".,-~:;=!*#$@"[N>0?N:0];}}/*#****!!-*/
  printf("\x1b[H");for(k=0;1761>k;k++)
   putchar(k%80?b[k]:10);A+=0.04;B+=
    0.02;}}/*********#########!!=;:~
      ~::==!!!**********!!!==::-
        .,~~;;;========;;;:~-.
            ..,--------,*/
```

source: https://github.com/Fifirex/donut.c

Code and Its Execution Can Be Art

- The code has a purpose
- but that purpose is divorced from material needs
- We don’t expect it to compute like we might tax software or a social network

source: https://github.com/Fifirex/donut.c

Code and Its Execution Can Be Art

```
@i=split //,pop(@ARGV);print@i,"\n"and$i[rand int $#i]=chr((int rand 94)+32)while($ARGV[0]--);
```

```
I am sitting in a room different from the one you are in now. I am printing plain text and I am going to recur this operation until the text is destroyed.
I am sitting in a roo( different from the one you are in now. I am printing plain text and I am going to recur this operation until the text is destroyed.
I am sitting in a roo( different from the one you are in now. I am printing clain text and I am going to recur this operation until the text is destroyed.
I am sitting in a roo( different from the one you are in now. I am printing clain text and I am going to recur this operation +ntil the text is destroyed.
I am sitting in a roo( differe&t from the one you are in now. I am printing clain text and I am going to recur this operation +ntil the text is destroyed.
I am sitting in a roo( differe&t from the one you are in now. ' am printing clain text and I am going to recur this operation +ntil the text is destroyed.
I am sitting in a roo( differe&t from the one you are in now. ' am printing clain text and IBam going to recur this operation +ntil the text is destroyed.
I am sitting in a roo( differe&t from the one you are in now. ' am printingHclain text and IBam going to recur this operation +ntil the text is destroyed.
I am sitting in a roo( diff!re&t from the one you are in now. ' am printingHclain text and IBam going to recur this operation +ntil the text is destroyed.
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```

found art

found art

I grew up wandering woods that weren't mine but I found infinite beauty in them anyway. The wispy breath of deer sipping from the melted edge of a frozen pond in the dead of winter. A wildflower craning its stem up through rusted junk some neighbor dumped in the woods. The enveloping pungency of swamp cabbage struck with the wind smoothed limb broken off a dead tree.

found art

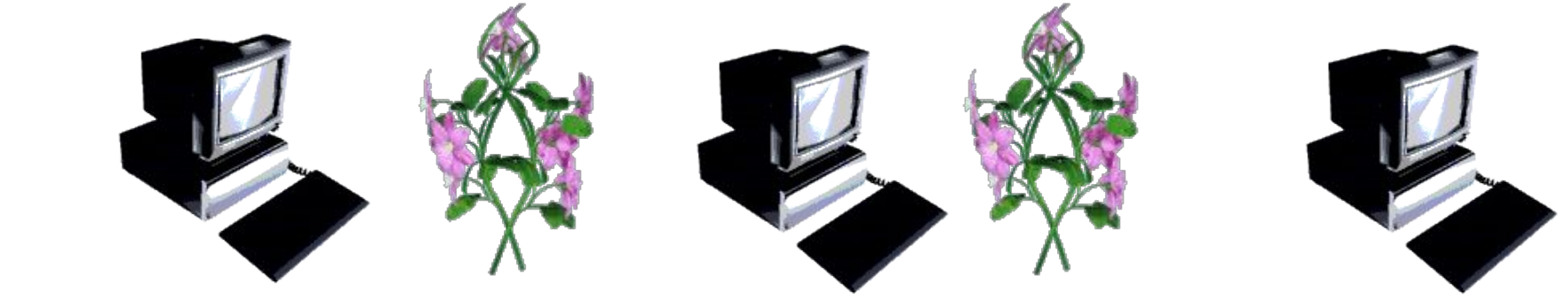
these machines and the networked web they've woven are bursting with the kinds of inspiration that nature has given to us humans since the very origin of our species.

found art

these machines and the networked web they've woven are bursting with the kinds of inspiration that nature has given to us humans since the very origin of our species.

I've tentatively named this mode in which I find myself and in which I often see townies. This hunt for the emotional and the beautiful in the great neon grid of cyberspace; this insistence on the importance of subjectivity as we write stories to each other all day in chat. I've dubbed it…

NEUROMANTICISM



end

Everything we type out is an attempt to serialize something inside us in some kind of container that we hope can be properly parsed by another human being. Our creative works can just be moments in time. They don't need to be planned, grandiose, or even necessarily crafted.

end

I believe we are in more need than ever for spaces where our imagination can feel unbounded even while the world outside seems intent on boxing us in.

end

thank you